BUDDHISM
Northern and Southern

N. SRI RAM

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BUDDHISM
NORTHERN AND SOUTHERN[1]

By N. Sri Ram

Just as in Christianity there are the divisions, Roman Catholic and Protestant, similarly in Buddhism there are the Northern and the Southern Schools. Sometimes they are described as the Northern and the Southern Churches, which is completely erroneous, because in Buddhism there is no such thing as church or priest. There are monks who for a time devote themselves to living the kind of life which the Buddha recommended as the best and to understanding those truths which are regarded as His teaching.

The ideas of the Northern School are of a much later origin than the Southern, and are followed mainly in Tibet, China and Japan; one hardly comes across them in Ceylon, Burma, Thailand and Cambodia. In the Northern School itself there are several divisions. Because the ideas of the Northern School are a later development, those who belong to the Southern School regard them as not strictly the doctrine taught by the

[1] A lecture given at the 81st Convention of the Theosophical Society on 30th December 1956.

Buddha, just as the Protestants in Christianity, who accept only the Bible, think that the ideas of the Catholic Church do not conform to what the Christ Himself taught while He was living. It is thought by the Southern Buddhists as well as by Western scholars that the ideas of the Northern School are a kind of romantic development, highly fanciful, with all kinds of elaborations, and not in accordance with the plain and rational teachings of the Buddha. Of course the learned men of the Northern School have quite a different view of the matter.

The Northern School has never rejected the truths of the Southern doctrine. It does not say that they are not important or not authentic.

The texts which give these doctrines have different versions. When the Buddha spoke, there were no notes taken. Everyone listened with his or her whole attention. It is only some time after He passed away that what He had said was collected from the memories of those who had heard Him or remembered His teaching. It has been said that some texts which were taken to Tibet and China became lost to India. We have in the existing Chinese versions parts of discourses not found in the Samskrit and Pāli books.

Northern Buddhism is based upon what is called the *Mahāyāna*, as distinguished from the *Hīnayāna*, which is attributed to the Southern School. *Mahāyāna* literally means "the great vehicle," and is sometimes translated as "the higher path," and *Hīnayāna* as "the lesser vehicle" or "the lesser path". These

appellations were given probably by those who considered themselves to be using " the greater vehicle " or following the superior path.

The main basis of the Southern teachings is to be found in the books called *Tripītaka*, sometimes described as the Three Baskets. Baskets are used to carry flowers. The teachings are pure, fresh and fragrant like flowers; so the books in which they are enshrined are compared to flower-baskets. Of the *Tripītaka*, one section deals with highly metaphysical truths and is called *Abhidhamma*. Now, metaphysics, if not rightly understood with an earnest mind with a practical humanitarian spirit, is apt to become purely verbal, dry and uninteresting. It is probably as a reaction against mere logic-chopping, dry, prosaic analyses, that the whole Northern development arose.

The concepts of the Northern School are also highly philosophical. They are lofty and have a certain mystical quality, as distinguished from the purely psychological. The Southern teaching uses the method of psychological analysis to a considerable extent. It is concerned with the workings of the mind, how the mind is caught up in sensation, affected by desire, and throws up all kinds of images, to which it gets attached, and perpetuates itself.

This is a teaching which recalls what Mr. J. Krishnamurti speaks about. There is a marked resemblance between the teachings of Buddhism and his teachings. It is not that we try to understand him through the

frame of Buddhist ideas. But when you see a resemblance, you cannot help seeing it.

The ideas of the Northern School are undoubtedly imaginative, and there is a very large element of emotional appeal in them. Whereas the monks of the Southern School pace the floor to and fro for a certain period of time in the morning and again in the afternoon, trying to understand and become aware of their own mental processes, the votaries of the Northern sects spend a great deal of time in chantings and adoration of the various Buddhas in whom they believe.

The Northern ideas are highly attractive to a certain temperament because of the quality of mysticism which characterizes them. They are exceedingly lofty, romantic in a beautiful sense, whereas the approach of the Southern School is in the main realistic, it believes in adhering closely to the ground of observed facts and reason. Being "realistic" means avoidance of every kind of exuberance; you see things as they are and not as you would like them to be; you do not indulge in flights of pleasing fancies, escaping from realities.

There are innumerable people also in Christendom who enjoy the pageantry, splendour and the spiritual appeal which are in certain forms of religious worship, and prefer it to mere moralizing and the singing of canticles in a bare, unadorned church.

Northern Buddhism has not only an atmosphere of unworldliness surrounding it, but transports you into a different world altogether. The devotee of this School lives in a world peopled by Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and

exalted Beings, who are all embodiments of various virtues and truths.

The main text on which the Northern teachings are based is one which is called *Prajña-pāramitā*. "*Prajña*" means transcendent wisdom or understanding and *Pāramitā* suggests an ultimate goal. The title as a whole has been translated as "the perfection of Wisdom". The book has several versions differing in text.

The whole of Zen Buddhism in Japan is a flowering from one of the branches of the Northern tree; it is a school which uses meditation of a certain sort as the principal means of coming to great realizations.

The founder of the *Mahāyāna* School is said to be Nāgārjuna, the great Indian teacher, described in Buddhist literature as one of the suns of Buddhism, the others being Āryasanga and Ashvaghosha.

Prajña-pāramitā has also been translated as "the Wisdom which brings a person to the other shore". Our worldly existence is comparable to an agitated ocean, with the waves rising and falling. We are inordinately excited at one moment and at the next in the dumps. The waves change their configurations and we are tossed about by them; we are the flotsam and jetsam of existence. But there is the "other shore" where is the pure or happy land in which one can find one's feet and rest safely. To arrive there is to arrive at a pure, tranquillized condition, a state of impersonal happiness.

Northern Buddhism includes a very large number of myths or stories, just as there are the Jātaka stories

popular among the Southern Buddhists also, which purport to relate the previous lives of Gautama, the life in which He was a hare, the life in which He was a deer, and so on. These are charming stories, but one need not take them literally. But if you take the spirit of the stories, the beautiful moral, that is all that is needed. The myths of Northern Buddhism describe the extraordinary feats performed by various Bodhisattvas at different times in different worlds. These are not mere feats of strength and intelligence of the ordinary type, but largely feats of virtue and wisdom.

The word Bodhisattva can be translated variously. *Bodhi* means "enlightenment, spiritual knowledge or wisdom," *sattva* means "strength" and can also be translated as "nature" or "being". Thus we get the meaning: "He whose nature is enlightenment or spiritual Wisdom." It is a Bodhisattva who eventually becomes a Buddha.

Gautama Buddha is said to have perfected Himself in all the virtues through life after life for a very long period, before He arrived at the stage called Buddha. During those previous lives He was a Bodhisattva.

Some of the Northern stories speak of assemblies of Bodhisattvas. There must be innumerable Beings who have attained to these great heights, and they can be contacted at a certain spiritual level.

When you study closely the teachings of the Northern and Southern Schools, you will find that they are really complementary. You can take the truth, leaving out all the embroidery, the fanciful ideas which the devout

imagination of countless Buddhists have woven round various exalted conceptions. As I have already said, in the Southern School the approach is mainly psychological; in the Northern School it is intuitive and mystical. There are certain realizations to which you come when all the psychological complexes have been resolved, when the understanding has been prepared to receive the Truth.

In the Southern School the essence of the teaching is in the Four Noble Truths, which are the foundation of Buddhism and of which the Buddha spoke in His first sermon at Sārnāth. These are: Sorrow or Suffering; the Cause of Sorrow; the Ceasing of Sorrow; and the Way to the Ceasing of Sorrow. That Way is designated the Middle Path, also the Noble Eightfold Path of Right Perception, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Means of Livelihood, and so on, all practical and ethical. These are the basis of Buddhism and accepted as such by all.

There are other sermons containing teachings explaining these Four Noble Truths: for instance, the chain of causation, how from one psychological state another arises, and how the various conditions that are produced tend to continue or perpetuate themselves, the chain that consists of contact, perception, sensation, attachment, desire, memory, and so on. It is the understanding of this process out of which comes the realization of what is called *anatta*, the non-existence or illusoriness of self. Most Buddhists speak of it as the illusoriness of the *soul*, but we might say the illusoriness

of the notion of a self separated from others, since the word "soul" has ordinarily a very vague connotation and can have different meanings. What is the motive for action when the self is gone? Only *Dhamma* or Law which guides the pure consciousness. The word *Dhamma* is used also in reference to the precepts of the Buddha which are all ethical and practical. The practice of *Dhamma* is said to lead to *Nirvāna.*

There is no God in Buddhism, who acts by design or acts arbitrarily, and decrees what should happen. The concept of Law replaces it entirely. There are Devas or Divine Intelligences. But they are only agents of the Law, and cannot over-ride it; it works through them. Sir Edwin Arnold summarizes the philosophical basis of Buddhism, its ultimates, in the phrase "Nirvana and the Law". It is a Law which includes everything. The many laws of Life and Nature are all manifestations of the One Law, as envisaged mathematically by Einstein for the physical universe. But the Law of Buddhism is moral as well as physical.

When a man observes the Precepts, walks in the way indicated by the Buddha, he conforms to the Law of the universe. There is nothing then in his actions which has to be rectified by Karma. He works with the Law. "I take refuge in the Law," says the pious Buddhist. It means: I take refuge in the Truth that underlies all things. It is the Truth which is clouded by our ignorance, by a separation in our minds which is caused by attachment and bondage; attachment to

pleasurable things, coveting them, wanting to remain in attachment to them, that is to say, lust, gratification, greed, possession, and clinging to security.

The word *Dharma*, of which *Dhamma* is a corruption, is a Samskrit word which has a rich connotation. But the Buddha gave a tremendous significance to what people had understood by it.

The word *Nirvāna* existed before the Lord Buddha appeared. You find it in the *Gītā* and the *Upanishads* of the Hindus. But it has now come to be very specially identified with Buddhist teachings. The Lord gave a new turn and meaning to it, as to certain other ancient words and ideas. The word *Nirvāna* means, literally, blowing out, extinguishing, as you may extinguish a flame. But extinguishing what?

All the references to it in the Buddhist canon make it clear that it is the extinction or blotting out of the self. "Self" means here the notion of self as distinguished from another. We all have that notion. The question then is: What remains if this self is gone? Is there something that exists and in what state? On one occasion the Lord Buddha was asked if *Nirvāna* was a state of being; He said, No. He was then asked : Is it non-being? The answer was, also, No. Obviously we are in the presence of a very subtle idea or reality—which the mere word *Nirvāna* does not and cannot convey. Anything which transcends our experience cannot be understood by us from descriptions, there are no words for it. A man who has been blind from birth cannot know the beauties of the

sunset. Yet *Nirvāna* is spoken of as the goal for all, because it is a goal which is in ourselves.

In an early text it is said that *Nirvāna* is " subtle, comprehensible by the wise, indescribable and realizable only within oneself ". " Realizable within oneself " implies it is an interior state, a state, not a place; the word " realizable " is meaningless if *Nirvāna* is annihilation, a state of nothingness or void. More than this, there are frequent references to the bliss of *Nirvāna*, to its blessedness, words which indicate not a negative, as understood by us, but an extraordinarily positive state, the apparent antithesis of that annihilation that Western scholars have assumed it to be.

Nirvāna is for all but has to be attained through right effort. It is said: " He who walks on the Noble Eightfold Path with unswerving determination is sure to reach *Nirvāna*." He can make an end of pain in this life. " In this very life he abides in the experience of bliss with a self that has become Brahman." " Becoming Brahman "—these are words used in the Buddhist text—there is no longer the self that previously existed.

The *Thathāgata*, which means One who has gone " that way " or the way of his Predecessors—the Buddha referred to Himself as such—who has reached *Nirvāna*, is " deep, immeasurable, unfathomable as the ocean". This does not sound like annihilation. The famous words of the Lord, " Into *Nirvāna* my mind has passed," are also illuminative in this connection.

Because of having reached *Nirvāna* while yet in body, He knew whereof He spoke.

What then is put out or dissolved? It is that which reincarnates, which is a product of becoming, of causation, as distinguished from that which eternally is. Becoming is in time, Being is timeless. What is it which eternally is? The Principle which eternally is, because it is simple, not a compound, is not dissoluble, and to it Hindu philosophy gives the name of *Ātman*, which is an uncreate Unity that breaks into a multiplicity and shines through diverse forms in diverse ways.

Nirvāna, which is a formless ocean of peace or bliss and blessedness, is also described as "an ocean of truth," but with no knower separate from the Truth. Though described in negative terms, it is evidently a state in which there is action of a sort we do not know, like the meditation of a Buddha.

All this is of great practical significance to us if deeply understood and realized, not repeated parrot-like, not verbalized. How are we to realize this for ourselves? By a life of perfect righteousness, by love, by self-knowledge and self-understanding, by becoming increasingly free of false ideas, free of wrong ways, all arising from action of the self. It is the life indicated by the Noble Eightfold Path.

The Lord Buddha did not speak of everything He knew and He did not encourage mere metaphysical speculation. He spoke only of those things which He deemed important. He is reported to have said:

> " Wherefore have I not told you that much more which I have learned? Because it does not conduce to progress in holiness, to the subjection of all desire, to the cessation of the transitory, to peace, to knowledge, to Illumination, to *Nirvāna*."

It is said that the Lord Buddha opened " the gate of the sweet Law " to all. When He lived on earth in the last of all His incarnations, as is stated in the books, the knowledge of the sacred things, of spiritual Truth or books containing that Truth was denied to all people except those of the Brāhmin caste. Only they were regarded as fit or qualified for the study of the scriptures; others had to take their instruction from the Brāhmins. But the Lord proclaimed, as is stated also in the *Bhagavad Gītā*, that he is a Brāhmin who displays certain *qualities*, and not one who has been born into a particular caste or family. It is only by virtue, a person's own merit, his life, his thoughts and actions, that his progress is determined, and not by the performance of any ceremony, the favor of any person, or by means of anything external to himself. Be ye lamps unto yourselves, was His teaching.

Nirvāna is a state which is so transcendent that it has nothing to do with our limited worldly existence. But he who has attained that state does not cease to act. If he is still in this world, he acts " for the welfare of the many, the gain of many, out of compassion for the world ". There is no personal motive in him, because

he has transcended the limitations of personality, which are all due to attraction and repulsion in many forms. This is the ethics of Buddhism:

> "As a mother at the risk of her life watches over her only child, so let everyone cultivate a boundless love towards all beings."

This state of heart, of goodwill without measure towards all, is described as "best in the world". "It is *Nirvāna*." In such a state, there is no separateness, no self-seeking. To live in that state is to live in accordance with the Law.

In the Northern system there are not only very many Bodhisattvas, but also many Deities, lofty spiritual Beings, designated Buddhas. The greatest of them all, the original Buddha, is termed Ādi-Buddha, and it is the one Unknown Reality or Principle. Then there is another Deity whose name is *Avalokiteshwara*, a word usually translated as "the Lord who looks down from on high," who is exalted yet benevolent and gracious. This is a wrong translation, as one of the letters in *The Mahatma Letters* points out. *Avalokita* means "perceived," so the word should be translated as "the Lord who is seen," who is visible or manifested, whereas Ādi-Buddha is the Unmanifested, like the Father in the Christian religion, "seen of none". Only the Son is visible, but the Son is one with the Father; the Manifest and the Unmanifest are one, essentially. Then there are other Deities: Amitābha, which means "boundless or measureless Light," the radiance which flows through the manifested Deity or

the Greek Logos. There are always doubts as to exactly what these terms mean. Amitābha is also described sometimes as Measureless Life or Vitality; He is the fountain of life, the one point from which Life emerges and flows in increasing volume and in ever-new directions.

There is also in Buddhism the concept of a succession of Buddhas, so that the Buddha whose name was Gautama is one of a long series of Buddhas. The Dhyāni Buddhas are different; They are, literally, Buddhas of Contemplation. Actually They are Intelligences at the highest spiritual level, who, like the Angels in Christianity, always " behold the face of the Father," that is to say, They are in direct communion with the Source from which They emanate. It is a communion which is both contemplation and action.

Another type of Being is the Pratyeka Buddha, often translated as the Solitary Buddha, sometimes as " Selfish Buddha," which is both misleading and sacrilegious. For how can anyone use the word Buddha and qualify it as selfish? The popular explanation is that He has attained for Himself, but does not care to pass on the wisdom to others ; He is satisfied with the Truth and just rests there. Pratyeka Buddha really means the Buddha who is in a class by Himself, set apart, different from the Buddhas with whom we are acquainted. They are inaccessible, alone ; they are the Buddhas who represent " the flight of the alone to the Alone," to use the language of Plotinus.

There are various other ideas connected with these teachings, such as the Three Vestures, which are the three forms or states in which every Buddha exists. Some of these ideas enshrine profound truths, others perhaps not. One has to use one's own discrimination or intuition in all these matters, try to separate the true from the false, as the legendary swan is said to have separated the milk needed for its sustenance from water with which it was mixed.

The three Vestures have been given the names Nirmānakāya, Sambhogakāya and Dharmakāya, *kāya* meaning body. Perhaps we can understand the distinctions between them thus.

If you look at any beautiful or perfect form, whether of a living thing or a work of art so-called, you are met with three aspects to it: First, that which meets the eye, namely the way it is shaped, its individuality, its action externally, the effects it produces; secondly, if you can enter *into* the thing, know it from inside, you will feel as it feels, see through its eyes, experience what it experiences. The words "it" and "thing" are used here merely for generalization. They include persons and beings of every sort.

A great Being, such as a Nirmānakāya or Sambhogakāya—sometimes these terms are applied to different classes of Beings, functioning in different ways, instead of to different vestures of one and the same Being—would show all the three aspects in a wonderful or outstanding degree. Beyond the form, beyond the individuality expressed in the form, and beyond the

aspect of Life in that form, the aspect of the particular type of experience and action which belongs to that Life, we may conceive, as the very basis of Life in that form, the very basis of the constitution through which it flows, the law that constitutes the special nature of that Individuality and of what is expressed and experienced therein. This would be the Dharmakāya aspect, the word *dharma* here meaning the very ground of the outer expression and action, the formula or law that determines the special nature of that action and expression, the special underlying nature of the individuality.

Dharma in Hinduism also means Law, as in the phrase *Sanātana Dharma* or Eternal Law which religion represents in the Hindu concept. *Dharma* is both universal and individual. The tree has its *dharma*, so has a human being, so has each individual being. In each there is the law of his or its being.

All these teachings and concepts are a fascinating study. They are not as fanciful as might be imagined by the ignorant.

When you have got rid of the self, which is the aim in the Southern School, when you are capable of a pure understanding, possess an unconditioned mind, have reached a state of perfect tranquillity, you come to certain realizations, and into touch with various spiritual levels and Beings. This is where the ideas of Northern Buddhism come in.

I might illustrate the different levels of existence, material and spiritual, human and divine, by means

of a diagram. Think of a double cone. In this double cone, the vertex is in the centre and it is the self, where there is the sense of I-ness, but also the uniqueness of the individuality which is indestructible. All that is below the vertex represents experiences at various levels which converge at the point of the self and create the idea of a " me " or " I " separate from all others. But the notion of a self is a myth and is really a stopper. It has to be removed or abandoned before the knowledge or Wisdom which belongs to the upper cone, the spiritual realms, can flow into the consciousness. It is when the funnel is uncorked, as it were, that the consciousness begins to flow with Reality, the truths that belong to the transcendent field or sphere of the upper cone.

He who has realized the illusoriness of the self does not find himself in nothingness, nor is he just a drop in an ocean of meaningless homogeneity, but he enters a completely new realm, which opens out like a marvellous celestial lotus. The individuality, in which is the character simultaneously of the One and the many, is at the point where the stalk of the lotus is joined to the unfolding spiritual flower. The consciousness has to be purified of all dross, become completely open, before it can receive the influences and truths which constitute that lotus, which belong to the spiritual or transcendental sphere. Before it is able to do so, it might entertain various conceptions that are fanciful, imagine one Buddha as the lord of a certain realm, another as meditating in a certain posture, and

so on and so forth. But such concepts are merely symbolical or adumbrations. We may call them projections, but in a mysterious way they point to realities to which one can come by oneself when the heart is utterly open and pure.

There are two main teachings in Northern Buddhism, one of them positive, the other seemingly negative.

The first is that the highest career possible for anyone is that of a Bodhisattva. A Bodhisattva is supposed to be generating all the time merit which he can bestow upon others. He accumulates blessing but retains nothing of it for himself; he distributes it, lets it fall over mankind as so much spiritual rain or dew. His whole purpose is philanthropic in the loftiest sense. The Bodhisattvas accumulate merit or generate spiritual forces which are radiations of various sorts, by practising the virtues, called *pāramitās*. These are described in H. P. Blavatsky's *The Voice of the Silence*.

We must understand that the practice of the virtues, according to the Buddhist teaching, is not practice in the superficial and perfunctory sense in which we generally understand that word. It is the exemplification of the virtue in a perfect and complete form. If it is *Dāna* or giving, it is complete charity, unbounded love; it means giving away utterly everything, holding back nothing for oneself. It does not mean that you build up an enormous store of security, and without detriment to it, give a little to somebody who asks for help, or make benefactions for the sake of fame. It has to be absolute charity, without any other motive.

The whole of this teaching is permeated by a spirit of compassion or love. You will find it running through and through. Everywhere the whole time it is the spirit of a Bodhisattva. Here is a typical prayer of a Bodhisattva named *Shāntideva*, literally, " a Being of peace ":

> " My own self and my pleasures, all my righteousness, past, present and future, I sacrifice without regard, in order to achieve the welfare of all beings."

Could we find anything more absolute than that? It is the one aim of a Bodhisattva, the one motive, the animating spirit of everything in his life, each decision, every step.

This note of altruism is found everywhere in Buddhism, also in the Southern School. The disciples were asked to go abroad and " journey for the profit of the many, the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world, for the good, profit and happiness of gods and men ". You cannot have anything more beautiful than that. This atmosphere of compassion is in all Buddhist lands and there is a feeling of gentleness there which is very characteristic. This exists of course along with all kinds of superstition and the various human weaknesses in many forms.

The Bodhisattva, living a life of absolute self-abnegation, arrives finally at a state of Buddha-knowledge. He has to live through many incarnations, to go on practising the virtues in different situations in life, in the various relationships in which he finds himself, until he arrives at that state which is practically a

state of spiritual omniscience, of perfect insight and knowledge.

The second teaching is the emptiness of all things in mundane existence. The stress is on the first teaching, though the two are correlated. If you ask those who profess the doctrine of emptiness what is meant by it, they are likely to give extremely vague answers. It is easy to get away with an utterly false conception of it, because it is too spiritual a truth to be understood by a mind which is not empty of all that can be emptied. Emptiness is apt to be a mere word, but the general idea is that the things we experience in the ordinary worldly life are vain in a certain sense. It is the emptiness of all forms, of all phenomena, of conditioned existence. Every form is a compound, therefore it is bound to be resolved into its constituents, it is impermanent. Even the so-called atom has a structure and is not simple.

All compounded things are unreal from the standpoint of the one sole Reality. Every one of them had an origin, it became compounded, it will be uncompounded, it is bound to disappear as a form. But there is one thing in all Nature, which alone is real, and that is the Self-existent Element or Principle, call it what you like, which is neither born nor has it become, it is eternally uncompounded. The Buddha has knowledge of this Self-existent Principle, and that is the final or perfect knowledge. You come to it through emptiness, which means a mind that leans on nothing temporary; the mind or the consciousness has to be unsupported before it can be absolutely free, before

it can find its perfect balance, its own eternal state. It is the mind which does not undergo any modifications due to any external or internal cause, and is like clear glass, through which shines the nature of the Self-existent Real.

It is said that all this teaching has only one aim, the attainment of that absolute freedom, which is *Nirvāna*; that, just as the great ocean has only one taste, that of salt, so the whole of this teaching has only one taste, which is the taste of freedom. It is freedom from every kind of superstition, from all dependence, every limitation, freedom from self.

Although the Lord Buddha is not worshipped and followed by Hindus in India, He is nevertheless regarded by them as the ninth *Avatāra* of Vishnu (the Second Person of the Trinity) agreeing in this conception with the Buddhist view that each Buddha in turn is an incarnation of Ādi-Buddha, or the Totality of Spiritual Wisdom in the universe.

With what profound reverence He is regarded by Occultists and Adepts or Mahātmas is indicated in *The Mahatma Letters* and other Theosophical books. In one of them He is spoken of as

> "the spirit incarnate of absolute self-sacrifice, philanthropy, divine kindness and all the other highest virtues attainable on this earth of sorrow".

Dr. Annie Besant explains that He was the first of earth's humanity to attain that exalted status among the men constituting the present humanity.

He is referred to in Buddhist books and prayers—prayer amongst Buddhists implying no request or

supplication—as the supremely Enlightened One, Blessed and Venerable.

Amongst Buddhists there is a legend, corroborated by others, that the Lord Buddha appears each year at some point north of the Himālayas, as a spiritual presence but in a form resembling that which He wore while He lived in India, and bestows upon humanity His special blessing. Brother Leadbeater gives in *The Masters and the Path* a beautiful description of this appearance:

> "The figure which floats above the hills is of enormous size, but exactly reproduces the form and features of the body in which the Lord last lived on earth. He appears seated cross-legged, with the hands together, dressed in the yellow robe of the Buddhist monk, but wearing it so as to leave the right arm bare. No description can give an idea of the face—a face truly God-like, for it combines calmness and power, wisdom and love in an expression containing all that our minds can imagine of the Divine. We may say that the complexion is clear yellowish-white and the features clearly cut; that the forehead is broad and noble; the eyes large, luminous and of a deep dark blue; the nose slightly aquiline; the lips red and firmly set; but all this puts before us merely the outer mask and gives but a little grasp of the living whole. The hair is black—almost blue-black—and wavy; curiously, it is neither worn long according to Indian

custom, nor shaved off altogether in the manner of Oriental monks but is cut off just before it reaches the shoulders, parted in the centre and swept back from the forehead. The story is told that when the Prince Siddartha left home to seek the truth, he seized his long hair and cut it off close above his head with a sweep of his sword, and that ever afterwards he kept it at the same length."

There are many statues of the Buddha in India and elsewhere, which, while they are noble and serene, represent Him as of the Mongolian type, whereas He was an Āryan prince of the Sākya clan, a clan of Kshattriyas in Northern India. But whether the face is Mongolian, Greek or Indian, every statue of Him represents an attempt by the artist to portray in its countenance something of the calm, nobility and God-likeness mentioned above. A perfect comprehension—which the title Buddha implies—is one that must mould itself perfectly on the form or rather the very being of the thing to be comprehended. And when the thing to be comprehended is life itself in all its variety and expressions everywhere, and every little change in these expressions, the consciousness that comprehends has to be one of extraordinary mobility and sensitiveness, possessing the quality of feeling with, modifying itself instantaneously in unison with, every movement of consciousness taking place in the living person or thing. This extraordinary mobility and sensitiveness is the very basis of that compassion which is an outstanding characteristic of the

countenance in all the best representations of the Buddha, and in some degree in almost every representation which corresponds at all to the Buddhist conception of His nature. A sublime serenity and along with it a quality of compassion, with no speck of rigidity, yet no weakness. The face is so beautiful because of this compassion and of what it implies.

The teaching of the Buddha, which He himself described as "plain, sweet and logical," are not really meant only for that particular section which calls itself Buddhist, but are of value to all. They are more needed in the world today than they ever were before. From the Theosophical and occult standpoint, there can be no opposition ever between teachings that come from one great spiritual Messenger and what is taught and proclaimed by Another, since They all belong to the same grand company of the elect and the noble.

"Of all the existing philosophies," says H. P. Blavatsky in *The Secret Doctrine*, "Buddhism is the least understood," probably because some of the truths taught by the Buddha were too deep for the ordinary understanding. They have been rejected by the orthodox among the Hindus in India, and misunderstood by many of those in other lands who profess to accept them.

It may be asked whether Theosophy agrees with all this, with the Buddhist teachings more than with the Christian or Hindu ideas, or the ideas of any other sect or school of thought. To all such questions my answer would be: The question of Theosophy agreeing with this

or that does not arise if Theosophy, which is usually translated as the Divine Wisdom, comprises the totality of Truth. None of us, so far as I know, is capable of comprehending it. We can only try to understand what is possible for us to understand, in which sense Theosophy for all practical purposes is no pre-fixed doctrine, no unalterable dogma. The Theosophy that I can speak of represents only my present understanding. If I say *this* agrees with *that*—which I may for certain purposes—*this* is something fixed at least for the time, and *that* is similarly fixed; but our understanding of what is Theosophy, the illimitable Truth, cannot be fixed forever.

Therefore we will do well always to try to see what is true or what may be true in any statement or any presentation. If there is some truth somewhere, that is part of the total Truth, which is Theosophy in the literal and comprehensive sense. It is then rather absurd to regard Theosophy as separate from anything we may understand to be right or true, and then speak of it as agreeing or disagreeing.

The Lord Buddha Himself asked His hearers not to believe something because someone else believes it or because many others believe it, or because it comes from a great antiquity and has been accepted without question, nor because it is said in a book which is regarded as sacred, nor even for the reason that He Himself said so, but to accept it only if it appealed to one's own reason and judgment as blameless and meritorious, as tending to the good of all, the

happiness of all. Test everything, He said, as gold is tested. This is the true Theosophical attitude.

The homage that is paid to a Figure so exalted, so benign and wonderful, by millions in many lands, cannot but bring about a great downpour of spiritual force calculated to heal, pacify and bless a humanity which is sorely in need of help. Let us hope that the event of the 2500th year after His passing marks a turning point in its history from the turbulence and evils that have marked the first half of this century to an era of real peace, based on a union of all peoples in true brotherhood.

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